

## Louise Maishman Tells Her Story

**Louise Maishman outlines her experience with breast cancer...**

**Getting The News:** the defining moment came for me on the 31 July last year when I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the Sydney Breast Clinic. I was with my husband Brent that day for what I thought would be a routine 10:30am appointment where we could go to Darling Harbour for lunch afterwards. That was not to be, and I had lots of tests lasting all day until after 5pm. This was the start of my rollercoaster ride of surviving breast cancer with 3 operations to remove my right breast.

In the lead up to the diagnosis, I was due to have my second ever mammogram in October last year. This was part of getting examined every second year on advice from my family doctor. Early in July, however, I felt like my left breast had been hit with a soccer ball so I went to my local doctor. She examined me and found no evidence of abnormalities or lumps, yet she had the foresight to send me to the Sydney Breast Clinic for a follow up mammogram.

There was no history of breast cancer at all in my family. When I told my mother, (who was adopted), she felt partially responsible because she did not know any of her family history. However, in researching the matter, I found that over 70% of the women that are diagnosed with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease.

Brent and I adopted an approach of being upfront and honest with our 3 boys: Oliver 15 (U15/16s), Tom 14, and Matthew 11 (U12s). After each appointment we also sat down with them to explain the progress. The NSW Breast Cancer Institute at Westmead also had plenty of reference material on hand and on-line to support us.

**Getting The Treatment:** the NSW Breast Cancer Institute at Westmead was reassuring all the way and I am indebted to the nurses for their care and support throughout. It is in the country areas where the McGrath Foundation is lobbying for funds to provide such nurses and something we city folk should not take for granted.

Ultimately, there was no waiting around and I had 4 sessions of chemotherapy between October and December last year. Each session last 3 hours and I had 3 weeks between each treatment. My parents and Brent were with me during each session and this meant the world to me as their company distracted me and took my mind away from it all.

One of the nurses told me that after each session I would feel like I was hit by a truck. Apart from feeling tired, I was lucky that the treatment did not affect me too badly. I also took anti-nausea pills to prevent me from feeling sick, especially after food. I lost all my hair a week after my second dose of chemotherapy and I looked a bit freaky as I even lost my eye lashes. I did borrow a wig during my treatment, but I found it too uncomfortable so a hat was my favourite accessory during this time.

**Getting On With Life:** through the support of my family and friends over the last 6 months, I have responded very positively to my experiences. I know that 1 in 8 Australian women over 50 will be diagnosed with Breast Cancer so why not me!?

I am still taking medication, I will resume bi-annual check ups and I am aiming for breast reconstruction later this year. Overall, I was fortunate to react quickly to the change that I felt initially in my left breast although it was the right breast that was affected. I promptly visited the doctor and they arranged the mammogram. So, if you are feeling any changes in your breasts – soreness, an unusual lump, or you are feeling tired and exhausted for no apparent reason, then go and see your doctor.